

# Praying Our Part

## Practicing Pleasing Prayer

July 9, 2023



Today we're talking about how to pray in a way that pleases our *Father* – and ourselves! So, **do your prayers please God?** And on the flipside, **do His answers please you?** Be honest! It's okay to say Jesus has disappointed you.



Because we've wired ourselves to want the things that grow from all our thoughts and ways down here – while God warns us His thoughts and ways are not the same; they're higher (Is 55:8-9). But up there, He can see where each thought and way ultimately ends. And because of His love, He only ever offers answers that lead the way to what we need; not necessarily what we want. So **it's natural to feel frustrated by up-there answers down here.** But look around, we want things like cigarettes, McDonalds, and reality TV; do you really think we can see what's best for us? No! We're clearly nearsighted! And deep down, we know we need that view from above and heart of love to get our thoughts and ways right! We need a partner with a perspective that can complete our picture. Which is where God comes in.



But because He sees all the things that we're blind to, **God's will, is always good, but rarely predictable.** It's foreign. And foreign often feels unclear, uncomfortable, or unbelievable. So when our Senior Partner in perspective offers answers, we should expect the unexpected until His foreign thoughts and ways start to feel familiar. Which is where prayer comes in.

Cuz **when it comes to seeing God's perspective, prayer is the practice that leads to perfect!** Each unexpected answer shifts our perspective to give us a better sense of our part in our partnership. For instance, in Acts 12 the Lord allows Herod Agrippa to kill His Apostle James (whom Jesus calls a Son of Thunder); but then for some reason, sends His Angel to miraculously rescue His Apostle Peter (whom Jesus calls the Rock) from Herod's prison.

[Then Peter] went to the house ... where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. ... she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" "You're out of your mind," they told her. ... But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. – Acts 12:11-16 NIV

Why?! They were all praying for him – wouldn't they assume every knock at the door was Peter as an answer to their prayer? Well, not necessarily if God just let James get killed. All we know is that they were surprised and that even then – our thoughts and ways are so inferior to God's, that **we can miss an answer to prayer knocking on our front door.** We can all be so blind to unexpected answers, that even the obvious can astonish us! Because we have it in our head that when we partner with God through prayer, we're the ones doing all the knocking. When in reality **the Rock often stands at the door to knock.** While **we often hesitate to open up to His unexpected answer.**

And just *imagine* if Rhoda had gone back and said, “**Sorry, we all know Pete’s in jail – so beat it you porch pirate!**” They all would’ve missed seeing how their prayers *actually* opened Peter’s prison doors! And it’s the same with each of us *individually*; **we won’t see God’s answer to our prayer until we answer His knock**. Cuz I hate to break it to you, but answering doors is *our job* as junior partners while the *Senior Partner* answers *prayers*.

However, **it’s also up to us to supply the prayers for our Partner!** Because it takes two to make a thing go right! So the question becomes, how, pray tell, do we pray the right way? Well I’m glad I asked. Because, as a pastor, I happen to know that *most* believers struggle with prayer. If you’re *not* the daily-disciplines type, **prayer can feel like a random afterthought**. And if you *are* the daily-disciplines type, **prayer can feel like a routine chore to check off**. But either way, a lot of us don’t expect much from prayer until things go sideways and we need to get God’s attention to hopefully squeeze a little miracle out of Him. But that’s not how it works and tragically, **we can miss out on prayer’s power when we misunderstand its purpose**.



So what’s our problem? *Perspective*. What if we’re seeing prayer mostly *backwards*? **What if the main point of prayer is to get *our* attention?** What if it was a way to get *us* refocused, recalibrated, and realigned to God’s will. **What if prayer changes what *we* do more than what *God* does?** And what if it was a surprising way to get *us* to open up to unforeseen answers that *exceed* all our expectations. Well, it does seem to have *that* kind of *effect* when *Jesus* does it. cuz:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. [And apparently in a certain way that was both foreign and *fantastic*, because] When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray,” – Luke 11:1 NIV

Okay. *Remember* **the boys aren’t beginners when it comes to prayer. Hardly!** Their Jewish heritage required a strict practice of memorized prayers that began in early childhood. Every morning. Every night. Three other set times each day. Before eating. After eating. And many other occasions. Some historians estimate that devout Jewish men in that day prayed 3-4 hours a day! So, **if *these* guys still need guidance, we shouldn’t feel so bad**. And obviously *they* could see something was *very* different in the way *Jesus* prayed. **Prayer wasn’t a duty, but a delight**. It wasn’t *taxing* – but somehow *refreshing* and *recharging*.

Cuz *Jesus* wasn’t checking off prerecorded prayers at predetermined times *nor* was He throwing it out as a random afterthought. For some reason, **He enjoyed getting away to pray** and was *always* eager to fill His free time with *another* chat with Dad! I mean, if *anyone* didn’t ‘*need*’ it, it was *Jesus*; He and the Father were already One! He did it cuz He *wanted* to – not cuz He *had* to; **this was nothing like these boys had ever seen**. And they *knew* they needed a peek from *His* perspective, but right after they ask *Him* to teach *them* to pray – which *is* a little in-person prayer *itself*– He gives an answer that is **unexpected, counterintuitive, challenging, confusing**, and utterly **life changing**.

And *that* turns out to be much more the *hallmark* of Jesus than *easy, obvious, and stress-free* answers. Cuz **hard answers produce change**. They *challenge our thoughts and ways* by coming from somewhere *outside of our perspective* – and *open us up to grow us up*.

Now from the *disciples'* existing perspective, they expect to get some religious *rules or routine* from the Master of prayer; but, true to form, Jesus gives them something *unexpected*. **He gives them truth instead of rules**. He gives them what we call *The Lord's Prayer*. Which is, as we've discussed, a *surprisingly comprehensive and incredibly concise guide* to praying that **changes impersonal ritual into intimate relationship**. Which is what *we all need* if we want to see what we're missing from the Senior Partner's perspective. However, our part in the prayer relationship can be *delicate and difficult*. So we're given three big warnings to keep us on track: **warning #1**:



*When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. – Matthew 6:5 NIV*

And what was their reward? People saw them. *Big whoop!*

But like Bruce said last week – all they wanted was people to see the big blue swinging strings on their showy prayer shawls, so they might think, **“Wow, this guy's rich, holy, and clearly a big deal with the Big Guy upstairs! I sure wish I looked like such a wrinkly old wizard!”** Some reward.

But what about *us*? **Does your struggle to pray the right way make you a hypocrite?** *No*. That's not *hypocrisy*. It's *failure*. And **failure doesn't make you a hypocrite, insincerity does**. And the big question, that Jesus is getting at, is this: **Do you present in public what you are in private?** If so, good news: you're *not* a hypocrite, you're a *failure!* And prayer can fix failures cuz they're open to an answer; it's the closed-off hypocrites who miss out on their answer because they already have the reward they wanted. So to pray the right way, **Jesus demands sincerity and authenticity**.

And in His **warning #2**, He adds *this* instruction and *promise*:

*When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is *unseen*. [Because, if you want be like Him, you should be *unseen* as well!] Then your Father, who sees what is done *in secret*, will reward you. – Matthew 6:6 NIV*



The Lord must love irony; cuz He sure seems to set us up for it! We're specifically warned to pray the Lord's Prayer Guide both **sincerely and secretly**; and yet, there is no other prayer that is more often recited both **mechanically and publicly!** **“But I find comfort in the Lord's Prayer.”** Sorry *failure*, **we're not supposed to find comfort in a prayer**. We're supposed to find comfort in our Father, as we faithfully follow by privately praying with a heart open to any answer He wants to give. And like we saw in the purpose behind those feather-tipped prayer shawls last week; **a secret meeting assures your prayer won't be just for show**.

And that's where He promises you've got a reward coming, but then tacks on **warning #3**:

And *when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans*, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do *not* be like them, for *your Father knows* what you need *before* you ask Him. – Matthew 6:7 NIV

Oh. But I thought prayer was something we can't do enough. Y'know, "**Pray continually**" (1 Thes 5:17)?



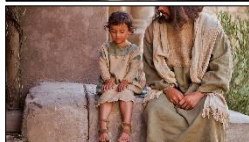
Well, *it is*. But, there's a big difference between *praying like a partner* and *babbling like a pagan*. **And it's all about the heart you have not the words you say.** *Why* are you praying? *That's* what God cares about. Because **your prayer's purpose determines if it pleases your Partner.**



And the purpose of prayer *isn't* to bend God's will to meet mine, but to bend mine to meet His. It's like seeing a spiritual *chiropractor* when we pray right; **our soul is adjusted to get us aligned with God.** But with pagan babbling, it's like seeing a SPIRITUAL *lawyer*; **our words are adjusted to get God aligned with us.** Problem is, God *can't* change and doesn't *need* to!



Don't ever forget that **we're the ones in need!** And our whole prayer partnership is purposed with changing *our* perspective so we can *see* what *we* need so that *God* can *give* it to us. *In fact*, all of His prayer guide and words of warning are meant to push us toward *that* reward. So *what is it?!*



Well did you ever notice there's at least twelve different relationships covered in this prayer guide: Our Father: **Divine Dad**. In heaven: **Ruler**. Hallowed be Your name: **Redeemer**. Your kingdom come: **King**. Your will be done: **Master**. On earth as it is in heaven: **Transformer**. Give us this day our daily bread: **Provider**. And forgive us our debts: **Judge**. As we forgive our debtors: **Rewarder**. And lead us not into temptation: **Shepherd**. But deliver us from evil: **Savior**. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory: **Almighty God!**

Why do you suppose it's written that way? *Because He's our reward!* His is the kingdom and the power and the glory, but *He's all ours!* The reward from *our* Divine Dad is **His presence** and **assurance** and **affection** and **guidance**. Because every sincere, secret prayer of surrender opens the door to His unexpected answers that change how *we* see *Him*. And bit by bit from He goes foreign to familiar. You come to know Him *intimately* as your Dad, Ruler, Redeemer, King, Master, Transformer, Provider, Judge, Rewarder, Shepherd, Savior, and God! Because guess what *He* says:

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in [And if you don't, He won't.] - Revelation 3:20 NIV

Cuz **praying the right way, opens doors** and He's the ultimate answer standing just outside your heart's door! So regardless of whether you're *praising, thanking, or asking* – **the prayers that please God, are the ones that open your heart to Him.** Cuz when you *do*, He gets to be the partner that *completes you*, who's *strong* where you're *weak*, *sees* where you're *blind*, and *finishes* what you *can't*. And *that answer* is always a people-pleaser, so go get the door!